1:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

## PREFACE

THE material presented in this book was collected by my late husband, Godfrey Wilson, and myself, between 1934 and 1938; he then being a Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation, and I a Research Fellow of the International African Institute. Godfrey Wilson was in the field from September 1934 to December 1935 (with one month's break) and again from September 1936 to January 1938; the interval having been spent in London, digesting material. I did not begin work until March 1935, and was invalided out of the Territory with malaria for six months in 1937, so that I only spent a total of twenty months in the field. We had three main centres of work: Mwaya on the Lake-shore plain, Isumba in Selya, and Ilolo on the plateau near the Moravian mission of Rungwe; and either together or singly we stayed for some time in Kinga country on the Livingstone mountains, in Ngonde, at Lubaga, near LiKyala, at the White Fathers' station of Makete, on the Lupa gold-fields, in the Government station of Tukuyu, and at the Church of Scotland mission station, Livingstonia (Kondowe), to which youths from Ngonde and a few from Nyakyusa go to be educated (cf. Maps II and III). At one time or another we walked through almost all the district except for the Ndali hills: that expedition, long planned, was repeatedly prevented by attacks of malaria. At Mwaya and Isumba we were lent disused mission houses close to villages; in Ilolo we lived in a Nyakyusa-style house built for us in the main thoroughfare of the village; when camping we pitched our tent within the village usually near the homestead of the chief or headman.

As will be seen, the Nyakyusa are an extremely democratic people, and we lived in democratic fashion with Nyakyusa dropping in to visit, and sharing with us tea, or occasionally more solid meals, at all times of the day. We in turn were welcomed and fed in our friends' houses. After the first few months the atmosphere was extremely cordial, and the Nyakyusa took immense pains to explain their customs and to invite us to events which they thought would interest us. We both learnt to speak Nyakyusa and took notes largely in the language.

2: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1957 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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THE material presented here was collected by Godfrey and Monica Wilson under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation and the International African Institute between 1934 and 1938. For leisure to complete the writing, and to revisit the Nyakyusa in 1955, I am indebted to the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the University of Cape Town.

MONICA WILSON

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[p. vii]

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6:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1939 FN17 Ngonde FN17



114 121 642

My wife and I were engaged in researches among the Nyakyusa from September 1934 to January 1938; and our informants constantly told us of the general similarity between their own customs and those of the Ngonde plain. They made it clear, however, that while they and the men of the Ngonde plain shared an otherwise almost identical culture they yet differed markedly in their political systems. The Nyakyusa, when the Europeans reached them, were organized in small independent chiefdoms, the people of Ngonde possessed a paramount chief, the Kyungu. More recently, among the Nyakyusa, a sustained attempt by the Tanganyika Administration to set up two paramount chiefs had failed; in Ngonde, on the other hand, where the Kyungu's supremacy had, until recently, been officially unrecognized by the Nyasaland Administration, his position seemed to be quite secure. The contrast was an interesting one and demanded investigation. Nor was this the only difference between the Nyakyusa political system and that of Ngonde; besides a paramount chief Ngonde possessed a group of hereditary nobles (*amakambala*) which was apparently quite unparalleled among the Nyakyusa.

114 121 642 171

So in July 1937 we crossed the Songwe and spent some time in Ngonde studying these differences. Our visit confirmed the fact that the traditional culture and social system of the Ngonde plain was in almost all respects identical with that of the Nyakyusa. The patrilineal kinship organization with marriage by cattle, the age-villages each with its great-commoner or headman (*ukifwa*), the little chiefdoms each consisting of a group of age-villages united under a hereditary chief (*umalafyale*), all were there.[1] The descriptions we were given of the traditional rituals at death, at girls' puberty, at the birth of twins and at the "coming out" of young chiefs seemed to be identical in general significance and almost identical in detail with the rituals we knew among the Nyakyusa. Language also was similar, though here the similarity had been less close in former times. And yet there were the two great differences: at the apex of the political system of Ngonde was the Kyungu, while a group of hereditary nobles formed an integral part of it. Again and again our informants confirmed this general identity, these specific differences: "Everything is just the same among us as among the Nyakyusa, only in the case of the Kyungu and his nobles (*amakambala*) is there any dissimilarity." How then was this "similarity to be accounted for?

[1] This social system is discussed in the first paper of this series—*The Land Rights of Individuals among the Nyakyusa* (1938), and also in papers contributed to *Bantu Studies*, one in September 1936—"An Introduction to Nyakyusa Society," another in April 1939—"Nyakyusa Burial Ceremonies."

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa



accessible in an earlier book, *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa*,[1] and the details need not be recapitulated here.

Perhaps the reader has already noted a certain difficulty over tenses: 'is' tends to merge into 'was'. When we first visited BuNyakyusa in 1934 missionaries of various denominations had already been at work, and a foreign government in control, for forty years past. Between 1934 and my last visit in 1955 the changes have been great, but I use the present tense for things seen at first hand, whether earlier or later, and a separate chapter is devoted to the twenty years' change. It is well to recognize at the outset, however, that in 1934 the sanctity and power of the 'divine kings' was already questioned and their rituals were curtailed, and even the pagan cosmology of the Nyakyusa was beginning to exhibit traces of Christian influence. One striking example was the changing, or rather the fluid, connotation of the name *Kyala*.

Two new types of organization developed in BuNyakyusa with the arrival of the Europeans: churches which are based on a principle of association wholly new to the pagan tradition—common belief as opposed to kinship or contiguity; and a centralized system of government. To these have now been added trading concerns, of which the most important are co-operative societies exporting coffee and rice.

The subject of this book is (i) the traditional rituals celebrated on behalf of chiefdoms and groups of chiefdoms, and (ii) the changing ideas and values apparent as a section of the Nyakyusa turn from paganism to Christianity. In the concluding chapters an attempt is made to demonstrate the links between the changes in social structure and the changes in ritual.

[1] Monica Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa*, 1957.

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa



always hangs under the eaves and is only used for prayer, filled it with water and put into it a stone and a live coal from the fire. Then he took some roots from the roof (previously put there ready) and we went off to the same spot as before (*vide supra*, p. 115). Kasitile chewed the root, took water and blew it out, and began to pray: 783 782 [778]

'Do not be startled, come in your own persons, gather together, with Mwakanjoki (60). You made friends with him before, now he has entered, he has made himself our friend. Indeed I made a mistake, I have come to enter; I cut you on the head, I have done wrong. The sons of Kagile (i.e. 59 + his descendants) complain of me, saying, "It is he who has gone off with the millet, bananas, and maize; and children cry at night behind the huts; we are barren because he has cut Mwakanjoki." I have sought this cow which you wanted. Mwakanjoki (60), Lwembe (37), Mwakalebela (19), Mwatonoka (29), Mwalubange (58), Mwakagile (59), Mwaijonga (82), Kyala (2), we have come to attend to you (pointing to the grave). Kikungubeja, Nyanigwa Kyamba Kitali,[1] Lyambilo (12) come to your home if you are at Mwalubange's (58), come if you are at Mwaitende's (61), come Mwakanjoki (60) and the Kinga and Lwembe (3); Mwakalebela (19) come, give me cattle and millet, and the powerful medicine which you had. Since you are brooding over me go out from my body, go out! I pay my debt. We have come to take you to your home since you have gone off in a huff, come! I will never cut your branches again. I fear you and I will respect the branches. Come to your house, that of Mwamaloba (85), of Kanjoki (mother of 60), come. And he (G.W.) is innocent (*mweha*), do not fear him. He is the owner of the ritual, he is Mwamaloba (85), he is my senior, I am the junior. Sometimes I wish to embrace him, sometimes I fear that he is going to imprison me.[2] May the bananas increase! I am left alone! It is I who am here! Move out of my body! And give us medicine! May the offering increase overnight, may the cattle increase and the maize, and in the morning let me tell Mwaipaja (G.W.) that the bananas and medicine have increased. If there is anything else you are a liar, if this chill begins again then I have gone, I am not here. Amen! (*sic*).' [769] [123] [789]

Very early the following morning the sacrificial bull was killed.[3] Kasitile had arranged that our Mohammedan cook should come to cut its throat.[4] Then, later in the morning, the crucial drinking and 'speaking out' began. Kasitile had provided two pots of beer. [771]

[1] Three Kinga princes whose names are titles of office.

[2] In the earlier years of our acquaintance Kasitile had denied both the smothering of an ailing chief and human sacrifice for the drum. It is possible that he had cooperated in either one or both of these ritual acts. He himself reported that the Sangu diviner had told him: 'You have a European as a close friend. . . . You enjoy his company much, but there is something left . . .' (i.e. the friendship is not yet complete). [114]

[3] Ostensibly so that he could partake of the meat, but the reasons given seemed inadequate.

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955) 1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

## CHAPTER III

## CHANGING CONDITIONS AND THE PRESENT SITUATION

### Population

At the African Census in 1948 there were recorded, in their own tribal [161]
area, approximately 198,000 Nyakyusa at an average density over the land available for their use of 212 persons per square mile.

In the Lake Plains alone there were, in 1948, 55,700 inhabitants living at an average density of 268 persons per square mile. Population densities in the other Nyakyusa areas were rather lower than this.

These figures do not, however, give the full picture from the point of view of land occupation and use, for large numbers of men, and some women, were at the time of the Census absent from their homes and living [167]
temporarily in employment areas abroad – chiefly in the Rhodesias and South Africa. I have estimated elsewhere that approximately 8,000 men would have been away in 1948, of whom 95 per cent. or even more would return to settle down at home, for there was only a very small proportion of men who remained more or less permanently absent. That is to say, these men remained dependent for their land needs on their own tribal territory, and indeed at least some were active land-holders whilst the rest had lesser rights in family holdings.

If, therefore, we include these temporary absentees, the measure of the pressure of population on the land is shown by an average density of population for all Nyakyusa of 220 persons per square mile. At least 3,000 of these migrant labourers (possibly more) had their homes in the Lake Plains, and this number increased the density of population dependent on the land resources of this region to 282 persons per square mile.

The statistically average family in 1948 comprised about five people, and therefore the population density can be restated in the form that for all Nyakyusa there were available about 15 acres of land per family. In the Lake Plains there were about 12 acres of land available. These averages do not, of course, take account of either unusable land such as swamps, steep slopes, infertile tracts, etc., nor of the land necessarily taken up by roads and paths, open spaces in the villages and the like.[1]

These figures indicate that, taking a broad and general view based on averages, the density of Nyakyusa population or their pressure on their tribal lands ranked amongst the highest in Tanganyika in 1948.[2]

Unfortunately census enumerations before 1948 were too unreliable to [114] ●
allow of any satisfactory estimate of the probable rates of population increase, but from general information and internal evidence it is thought not unreasonable to suggest that in the Lake Plains population is increasing perhaps at the rate of one per cent. per annum; and in the rest of the tribal area the annual increase may be one and a half per cent. per annum. The high incidence of malaria and other debilitating diseases in the Lake [169]
Plains during the flood period of the wet season each year accounts for the lower estimate of increase there.

1. The measure is taken in those subsidiaries of Nyakyusa who were permanently resident in other parts of the Territory. These lived chiefly in Mbeya District (Chunya, Usafwa and Mbeya Towns) which they constituted almost 10,000 in 1948.

2. The highest population densities in 1948 were as follows:—Kibaha Island (Chalinze District) 898, Mkuzi [sic] (Handeni) 268, Lushoto 278, Kongwa (including Mpwapwa, Kibakwe, Kigwe, etc.) 241, Mpwapwa 240, Kondoa 230, Kilimatinde 140. Figures extracted from *Population Returns*, Govt. of Tanganyika, 1952.

12: Biegaard E-5 (1955) 1962 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa
Chagga FN4
Haya FN8

# House-types of the Banyakyusa

By Auguste Biegaard

During a stay in the Southern Highlands in Tanganyika in 1955, I was given the opportunity to inspect—and draw plans of—some of the houses belonging to the local Bantu tribe of the Nyakyusa. In literature they are known also under the name of Konde.

The district in which they live is fairly high above sea level and near the borders of Rhodesia and Nyasaland; the rainfall is fully adequate. Banana and coffee are doing well—the banana trees often forming groves in between which you catch a glimpse of the village houses.

The district invites comparison with other localities in Tanganyika where the country is high, and where precipitation is plentiful. Such localities would be the districts around Kilimanjaro and near Bukoba to the west of Lake Victoria. In the former live the Chagga tribe, in the latter the tribe of the Haya. Even here banana and coffee are plenty—and the I.Q. of both tribes is said to be high, as is the case of the Banyakyusa (plural of Nyakyusa).

Maybe you might therefore expect to find a corresponding standard of dwelling-houses, perhaps even the same type of hut. But in this matter you will be highly surprised; so great are the differences between the three areas. Apart from the original design of the house being round and the roof thatched, no similarity exists between the various houses or their interior lay-outs.

The round, thatched Chagga hut has its roof all way down to the ground. It is not very large and the interior lay-out is quite primitive. A cow or goat lives all its life indoors and is fed there. A short and uncomfortable bed is found near by. Down the centre of the floor is a stone-paved aisle. Everything looks quite simple—especially when you remember that in other aspects the Chagga are quite advanced in their use of modern facilities; for instance they use electricity for the grinding of their maize.

The Haya hut—the old, round type—is a really magnificent thing. I think its centre is seven or eight metres high. In front it has a kind of overhang, maybe you might call it a front room, where people will sit, and where guests will be received. If you are a welcome guest, a straw mat will be rolled out to cover the grass flooring of the hut. The walls of the front room are solid plates made from a kind of reed. The hearth is placed near the centre of the inner room.

[P.49]

12: Bisgaard E-5 (1955) 1962 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa
Haya FN8



H 342 As indicated above, the floor is covered with grass. Various domestic utensils may be seen, stuck into thin screens of plant material.

H 342 178 But this old, beautiful type of hut is very much on the decline. It is costly to make and to keep in repair, and the thick straw roof is, admittedly, highly inflammable. A flying trip round Lake Victoria clearly shows how the straw roofs in the banana groves are being replaced by corrugated iron. This change may even have another reason, viz. the fact that fodder for cattle is in short supply and that the grass for roofs is hard to come by. No doubt, it is a question of time when the fine old Haya hut will have disappeared.

N 114 In the Southern Highlands, where I was given the opportunity to stay for three months at various Danish mission stations, I visited the village round the Rungwe mission, the neighbouring villages of Ibito and Kikota, and some villages near the Rutenganio mission station. I made a trip to Lake Nyasa and another to the Poroto mountains. I must admit to a limited knowledge of drawing technique and of house construction, but I have measured a number of houses and sketched their plan and also the furnishings I found in them. The positioning of the various objects has been established.

N 361 [342 356] The high standard of dwellings of the Nonyakyusa is truly to be wondered at. The houses, clustered in villages, often along a winding street, lie intermingled with banana and coffee bushes. The houses are large and their interior is clean. Often two or three houses belong to one family, and, if so, will be grouped round a courtyard.

N 342 [824] Even if you could find houses built from sun-dried bricks and fired tiles, most were from bamboo with a grass roofing.

All houses stand on a clay base which, though not very high, no doubt means some protection against penetration of ground moisture during the heavy rains of April–June.

N [824] Besides bamboo, sometimes the bole of tree fern, *mukoke*, is used in outer walls. Such tree fern stems have not the carrying capacity of bamboo, but they are far more resistant to rot. Among the other common features of the existing types of houses, should be mentioned the mud cloths, the size of rolls that from the inside are pressed between the vertical bamboo poles; also, the inner wall is roughcast with a mixture of mud and cow-manure; the floor is from tamped clay. In some places you find very fine floors in which a pattern has been rolled into the wet clay; to this end a short length of the stem of the banana cluster has been employed, viz. the length between the seats of the male and the female flowers. Also employed are another plant stem, or an empty corn cob.

N [287] [531]

N 354 585 In all houses where women live, there are one or more hearths. The presence of two hearths in one house usually means that the husband has two wives, each wife having her own hearth, either in the common house or in a house of her own.

N 342 The houses always have a kind of ceiling made from bamboo sticks and carried

13:Lehmann E-5 (1939) 1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa



# Some Field Notes on the Nyakyusa

(Tukuyu District, Tanganyika Territory)

By F. Rudolf Lehmann

The following field notes on the Nyakyusa (Wanyakyusa, Wanyakjusa) represent only a small part of what I wrote down during my residence of about three months among this people in the summer of 1939. The present selected notes refer only to my sojourn in the village of Katumba near Masoko, with an ethnic group of the Nyakyusa who call themselves „Wa-Masoko"[1]. Notwithstanding the short time I had

[1] Cf. R. Thurnwald, p. 88; G. Wilson, Land Rights, p. 31.

13:Lehmann E-5 (1939)1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa



for research, I am very grateful for a grant from the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures[1] which enabled me to start my ethnographical field work among these people. I wish also to express my thanks to the Government of the Tanganyika Territory, the Provincial Commissioner of Mbeya, and the District Officer of Tukuyu for all the courtesy I received during my work.

1. My first step, after my arrival at Katumba near Masoko, was to pay a visit to Mwamasika, the chief *(omulafyale)*[2] of the village and

The chief Mwamasika with his councillors.

of those adjacent. On the open place near his hut he welcomed me in company with his *amafumu*[3], the influential men of his villages. My attendant, the interpreter and I were asked to sit on chairs, while the *amafumu* sat down on mats or on large banana leaves on the ground; but the chief remained standing. I explained the aim of my visit, and that I would be very glad of his support. The chief promised it, and he kept his promise excellently. On other occasions the chief also sat on a chair. In the afternoon of the first day I sent to the chief some presents. The following he made a return in form of food. This exchange of gifts is named ukubonola, handing over the gift.

2. In a small village belonging to Mwamasika's chieftainship was the residence of a medicine man, to whom I paid a visit as soon as I could. When I met him he was being consulted by a sick male person who had a stomach complaint *(apafu)*. After some negotiations he allowed me

[1] Cf. Africa, Vol. XI, p. 497.
[2] Cf. Wilson, Introduction, p. 282; Land Rights, p. 44.
[3] Cf. Wilson, Land Rights, p. 13. W. translates *alifumu (alifuma)* by „great commoner", Introduction, p. 278, 282.